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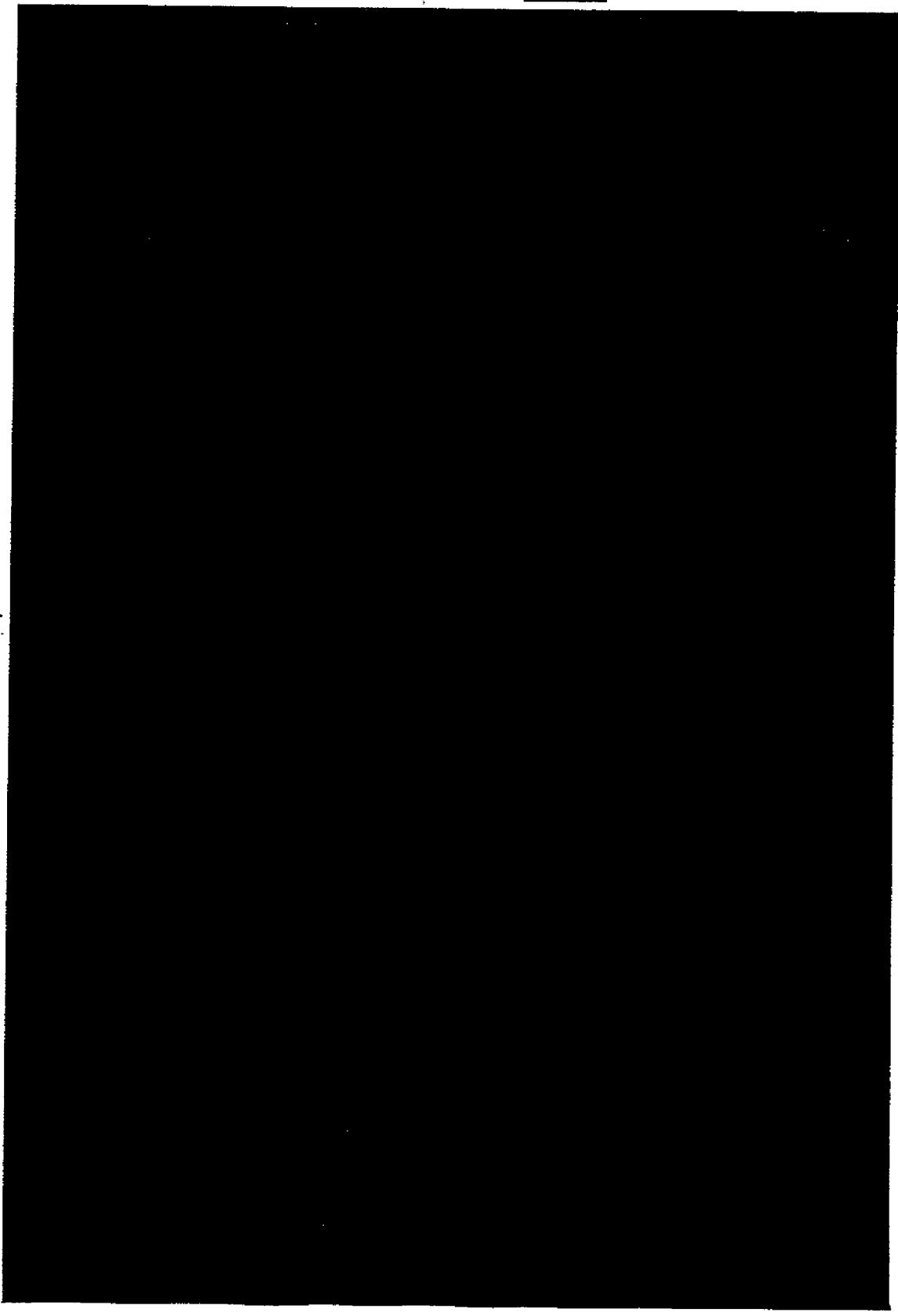
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Chile: Human Rights Issue

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The OAS meeting beginning in Santiago today will draw attention again to the issue of violations of human rights in Chile. Despite the serious foreign policy problems caused Chile by the issue, its leaders have been slow to deal with the problem. In part because they believe their hard-line approach is working to keep down dissidence inside the country.

The government has taken some steps, nevertheless, to reduce repression.

A decree of the Chilean government in January purported to put teeth in earlier edicts regulating the conduct of arrests and the treatment of prisoners. The fre-

quency of torture appears to have diminished. Following Secretary Shultz's visit in early May, the junta seemed to be speeding up the release of detainees.

Chilean spokesmen have made public the trial and conviction of some security officials for grave abuses of human rights and sold others were awaiting trial for similar offenses. President Pinochet has authorized his interior minister and the president of the Supreme Court to investigate possible violations of human rights.

On the other hand, the government has given no indication that it may lift the state of siege that gives security forces wide latitude in exercising their authority. Draconian measures continue to be used against opponents, although there are signs of greater selectivity.

Reports of illegal detentions and disappearances are still being heard—on a reduced scale—as officials either circumvent or openly disregard the laws governing their conduct.

There is little reason to believe that the junta will ease its heavy-handed restrictions in other areas. Its members have been quick to take offense at political criticism. The already ample censorship provisions were expanded last December, and since then the regime has clamped down on the radio and press outlets of the opposition Christian Democratic Party.

Political Attitudes

Military attitudes toward the Christian Democratic Party—the country's largest—and its leader, former president Eduardo Frei, have long been hostile. The Christians Democrats have even been blamed in large part for Allende's ascension to power.

Chances of reconciliation between the military and the Christians Democrats appear remote. The junta seems to want to destroy the party by splitting and weakening it. As long as the junta continues on this course, the Christian Democrats, weakened by internal divisions, stand to be shoved further to the periphery of national life.

The government's relations with the

Catholic Church are also antagonistic, but both sides have refrained from taking positions that would force an open break. The church hierarchy believes—probably correctly—that the government is bitter about the church's role in behalf of human rights and considers it a rallying point for anti-government agitators.

Cardinal Silva has promised to make his complaints privately, but he has recently been enraged over the arrest of lawyers active in church-sponsored programs to defend political prisoners and has threatened a public protest.

Labor leaders are increasingly outspoken in their opposition to the regime and frustrated over their inability to influence policies or protect the workers' interests. They are aware, however, of the futility of open protest.

Facing greater suppression, they will probably remain quiescent. Sweeping purges of the universities and other educational institutions have demoralized intellectual circles and intimidated students and faculty opponents.

Some groups previously considered supporters of the junta are becoming disaffected. Leaders of the conservative National Party and small businesses are restive under the impact of the economic depression and the curbs on political expression. This loss of support does not threaten the military regime immediately, but it does portend a significant long-term erosion that could leave the junta with only its hardcore following.

Growing Self-Awareness

The junta's attempts to eliminate the political system that existed before the coup are consistent with its ideologic aim of building a new society based on right concepts of collectivism, Christian humanism, and authoritarianism. The military has made little headway toward creating a clear institutional base for its new society, but there is no real challenge to its domination.

The military clearly plans to play a prominent role for the indefinite future. Public support for the junta has waned steadily since its takeover, but not enough to have a decisive impact on the overall political situation.

Government leaders believe they are on the right track, and in the past few months they have displayed fresh confidence reflecting their belief that the worst obstacles have been overcome.

Recent economic and political developments have confirmed—in the junta's eyes—the correctness of its policies. Military leaders see Cuban-Soviet moves in Angola as reinforcing their view of the dangers of communism. They interpret the coup in Argentina as yet another in a series of justified military takeovers in response to anarchic political conditions created by Marxist.

The generals in Santiago view with gratification and approval the growing ideological affinity with most of their South American neighbors. Pinochet's recent state visit to Uruguay, for example, underscored the creation of closer ties based on mutual antipathy toward communism.

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